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15 Being, Learning, Doing: A Palace for the Children?

A Tween's Library Seen from the User's Perspectives

Introduction

The connection between democracy, empowerment, and participation at the political level is clear: without an empowered citizenry that are willing and able to shape their own future and the future of their country through participation, democracy and democratic processes are compromised. Working towards a participating an empowered public could in other words strengthen democracy. But what measures are needed to do so? In recent years public libraries have emphasized both empowerment and participation as objectives for their activities. Several of the Nordic countries have library acts incorporating public libraries' role in democratic infrastructure. Casper Hvenegaard Rasmussen posits participation as the absolute "buzzword" in cultural politics and cultural mediation (2016, 39). Research investigating how public libraries – being free and open democratic public spaces – support democracy has also developed over the past decade (Buschman 2019).

At the core of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is child participation. According to Hart (1997), participation is important both for individual children, participating in decision-making affecting their lives, but also for children to be involved in decisions affecting the larger community where they live. Hart goes on to call participation "the means by which a democracy is built, and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured" (Hart 1997). In other words, efforts to strengthen empowerment and participation should include both adults and children. Designing library space for children and youth implies that the users themselves are involved in the process of developing and maintaining it. Equally important is the ongoing development of empowerment among the younger library users. Williams and Edwards (2011) investigate in an Australian case study how public libraries, by providing youth with space and resources, can contribute lasting benefits for them and their capacities for citizenship, for their families, and the wider community.

In this chapter we investigate the library's empowering aspects within the context of Biblo Tøyen, a library designed and open only for children between

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ten and fifteen. It is unique in a Norwegian context, but inspired by TioTretton in Stockholm, and the Library of 100 talents in Holland. Both these libraries have been designed and developed with the involvement of users – the children themselves (Mosch and Bertrams 2009; Bayliss 2015). Most libraries put a special emphasis on creating services for children, but traditionally these have been centered around books and reading. At Biblo, the goal is to create a third place (Oldenburg 1989) for children and make them active contributors and participants in the library. Learning, knowledge, and culture still take center stage, but literature does not underpin the activities in the library. Cooking, playing games, or creating things are the most visible activities at Biblo.

Biblo is situated in Tøyen, an inner-city district of Oslo which undergoes a rapid gentrification process. This area is also known for certain social problems, among them child poverty. As part of the city's efforts to improve the area for its inhabitants, Biblo was set up as a cooperation between the city and the Oslo library system, Deichman, at the same time as the local public library was refurbished. Biblo is situated at a public square, next to cafes and restaurants and welfare service offices.

This analysis is part of a larger study, where we have examined the design and aesthetics of the library (Vold and Evjen 2016) and interviewed the staff to investigate their professional perspectives on creating a library space for this age group (Evjen and Vold 2018). From our previous published research on Biblo, the following themes and findings surfaced.

1. User participation in designing the library. The intention behind Biblo's spatial design was to provide children with a place they could feel ownership to, a place to hang out, to feel at home, to use according to their needs and desires. Serendipity was the crucial effect that the manager wanted to accomplish, when speaking about how the books and shelves were designed. Otherwise, the focus was to provide children with a place which signaled fun and creativity and smaller rooms where they could "chill" and be closed off, alone or with their friends. The collection plays a minor part in the design.
2. The staff's perception of professional identities and roles vis-a-vis the users. Interviews with the staff highlighted particularly three aspects: a) building individual relations with the users was alfa and omega for the library to work; b) they looked upon their work with the users as part of a strategy to empower children, particularly those with few opportunities to partake in the cultural life elsewhere, or through helping with homework; and c) the ideal of children's participation ruled how activities were organized (for instance that no adult could enter, "do their thing" i.e. reading from a new book, do research on the kids, and then leave). The staff's ideas of the library coincide on the one hand with old ideals of Bildung and education, and on the other with more

modern ideals of empowerment, and of the child as in the process of being, rather than of becoming. None of the staff members are trained librarians; they have mixed professional backgrounds from arts and education but all have experience with youth work. The staff's professional identity as librarians is closer to the youth worker than with the teacher. Mediation of culture is important to the staff but mediation of *literature* is not prioritized as it is in the traditional library.

Historically, control has been an important motivation when developing library services for children (Tveit 2016), keeping them off the streets and providing a regulated service. Our previous research showed us that regulations and rules gradually have developed at Biblo, benefitting the children's safety within the library space. Certain frictions between autonomy and control, freedom and safety, are hence also manifest at Biblo, as it is in the wider community, where Biblo is presented as a solution to social issues in the neighborhood – an answer to the problem of children (where children are perceived as a nuisance), as well as the problems in the neighborhood (perceived as an environment which children should be protected from). To understand how Biblo works, we need the voices of the children, the ones Biblo is for. Their input allows us to explore to what extent children's libraries can support participation and empowerment, and also the interplay between autonomy and regulation that occur in this context.

We address the following questions:

- How does Biblo work as an arena for participation and empowerment for the children coming there?
- How is autonomy and freedom perceived by library users?

Theoretical Framework: Studying Children's Library Use in a Public Sphere Perspective

In his essay entitled *The Public Realm* (2010), Richard Sennett describes the public as "a place where strangers meet". In the urban context, a myriad of "publics" exists, recognizable as places where people are unfamiliar with each other. What makes the publics interesting and important is not the unfamiliarity, Sennett argues, it is that what takes place there cannot happen in private: "people can access unfamiliar knowledge, expanding the horizons of their information [...] In *the public*, people can discuss and debate with people who may not share the same assumptions or the same interests. Democratic government depends on such exchanges between strangers." Any library space can, by this perspective, be part

of the public realm. They are open and free for all, and provide a physical space where information is available, and knowledge is shared. Sennett points to Hannah Arendt, whose ideal public realm lets people discuss and debate freely and equally, but this is only possible if they are not tied to their private circumstances. Public libraries as meeting places and arenas for participation and community engagement have been the subject of several studies during the past decade (Aabø, Audunson, and Vårheim 2010; Aabø and Audunson 2012; Johnson 2017), and one feature that sets them apart from many others is how people can come together despite their different circumstances.

Social equalizing is a goal in the politics of the welfare state, and the development of libraries and library services have been part of this objective. Public libraries are also part of city planning. In *Palaces for the People* the American sociologist Eric Klinenberg claims that libraries are the prime buildings among public service buildings to form the social infrastructures of the cities (2018). Shared public space is essential for such infrastructures. Klingenberg's account of the public library accentuates that being allowed into a public space without judgement, expectations to pay, fundamentally secures (marginalized) people's dignity. All these perspectives – social equalizing, urban planning and the formation of a change-making place – form the background for building Biblo. Biblo serves as a shared public space on the one hand mimicking a larger community, it is an important part of the social infrastructure of Oslo, and the library space is constructed to bring about positive change for those who participate in using and making it.

Public libraries are still negotiating and developing their capacity as democratic infrastructure. One approach is the idea of the participatory library, which has emerged as a new understanding of how libraries can meet and engage the users (Cuong Nguyen, Partridge, and Edwards 2012; Rasmussen 2016) through participation. The term "participatory library" reflects an understanding of users as more than recipients of culture and knowledge; they should also be active partners, co-creators of library activities, and content. Rasmussen shows how participation can be seen as audience development, a catalyst for cultural diversity and a competitive resource (2016). The term empowerment originates from psychology and refers to "a construct that links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviors to matters of social policy and social change" (Zimmerman and Rappaport 1988). It is applied within different disciplines, including Library and Information Science (LIS). Johansson and Hultgren (2018) stress the importance of creating library space for children, at the same time as operationalizing concepts like participation and empowerment.

In their four-space model (2012) Jochumsen, Rasmussen, and Skot-Hansen outline a conceptual model for public libraries, where empowerment, along with

innovation, is listed as one of the libraries' overarching goals: "Empowerment concerns development of strong and independent citizens who are able to solve everyday problems," they say. In their model, it is particularly the library as a learning space and a meeting space that underpins this objective. Research focusing on digital competence, outreach or the social aspects of the library often use the empowerment perspective when looking at outcomes of such programming (Sandoval-Almazán, Gil-Garcia, Luna-Reyes, Luna, and Rojas-Romero 2012; Sung, Hepworth, and Ragsdell 2013; Brewster 2014).

Turning to childhood research, the concepts of "being" and "becoming" are essential in order to understand how children have been and are perceived. Are they merely "being", as independent actors, or are they in the process of "becoming", "adults in the making", as Uprichard describes (2008)? She suggests that it might be more fruitful to see these concepts not as mutually exclusive, but rather theorize children as both beings and becomings – not one or the other. Marianne Gullestad has advocated a shift from the study of childhood as such, to the study of specific childhoods (1996, 17). She breaks the analysis of childhood down to three different kinds of research areas: 1) facts in the lives of children; 2) ideas and images of childhood; and 3) experiences of childhood. Whereas the two first "research foci are explicit adult perspectives on children's lives", the "last research focus suggests studying children as children in order to grasp their perspectives of the world" (Gullestad 1996, 18). The aim is to see society from the point of view from the children. In this study, we uphold the user perspective and focus on the children's experiences of this particular public culture arena.

A Task-oriented Methodology

The study of the children's point of view in the context of research is inherently an adult perspective, as Gullestad also underscores. Using children as informants furthermore raises issues concerning ethics, planning, engagement and approach, which are different from targeting groups consisting of adults (Tinson 2009). Barriage (2018) suggests a task-centered approach, which entails engaging the young informants in activities that play into their strengths and competencies while collecting data. Our first visit to Biblo took place before the opening in March 2015, and we have up until April 2019 regularly visited and observed the activities in the library. Entering Biblo for research concerning the library user, as well as our previous observations and findings, were at the back of our minds. However, the kids' responses in this part of the study was not intended as an evaluation of the findings of our own previous research, although they chronologically follow those by the management and the staff. While we had the previous

research in mind when meeting the kids, what we wanted was to listen to their version without asking set questions, in order to explore their narratives and not have a predetermined narrative unfold. The method we used allowed the children to set the agenda, and made possible an exploration of their preferred themes, and we could then use this material to analyze the topics of empowerment and participation.

A certain negotiation of the gap between our adult and the children's perspectives was bound to take place, and our approach reflects an attempt to bridge the gap, with the knowledge that it cannot be removed. Biblo has been the subject of much interest and attention, from researchers, librarians, politicians and the general public. The management has become increasingly restrictive about granting adults access because they want to protect the children, and not make them study objects. To be welcomed in, you must give something back. For us, this meant that our first step had to involve getting to know the children, of value for us, by providing them with something of value for them. We also knew that in order to explore the children's experiences and perspectives of Biblo, interviews would not work without establishing a common ground with the children. In order to create this, we developed a task-centered methodology.

Previous studies of the library space and interviews with the staff directed us towards the kitchen, described by them as "the heart of Biblo" (Evjen and Vold 2018). For a period of six weeks, we spent afternoons in the library cooking or baking with the kids. This period served as a type of *reconnaissance* of a territory we knew on the surface. We did not take detailed notes from this period, in any strict form, but our observations and experiences were important groundwork prior to formally approaching the kids with questions about their library use and experience. The main research value in this phase came from gaining a sense of place, an understanding of the context and from making us known. By being available for the kids, they became used to seeing us in the library, and when we later approached them they could make a more informed choice of whether they said yes or no to talking to us, simply by having an idea of who we were and what we represented. For us, it was easier to make our questions more open and relevant, and we had a better idea of how various groups of children used Biblo (the amount of newcomers, regulars, kids who lived in the neighborhood or came from other parts of the city, how the kids operated in pairs, groups or alone etc.). Also, it made the next phase, approaching the children, easier.

In this phase, we wanted the children to show us what they liked about the library. We gave them a Polaroid camera and asked them to take four photos. If asked for more particular instructions, we would suggest they take photos of the areas or objects they preferred, or of something that represented what they liked to do while being at Biblo. Focusing on the task, as Barriage (2018) suggests, we

did not influence their choices in any way – although the kids themselves may have influenced each other.

Afterwards, we met up for an informal talk, mostly one by one, sometimes in pairs, and at one occasion a group of three kids talked to us. Twelve children met us in total, from the age of ten to 13, and we taped and transcribed the conversations. We did not follow an interview guide but had a list of topics we wanted to cover and let the motives of the photos lead the way into the discussion. The photos made the base for open-ended conversations about Biblo. These also concerned various contexts of the children, their after-school activities, where they lived, homework and life in general.

The Biblo patrons form a heterogeneous group. Since we already had made contacts and were familiar with the library, it was quite easy to select a variety of informants: new and experienced users, girls and boys, different national and linguistic background. We didn't need to make these kind of categories a topic in the contact with the kids, unless they addressed these themselves.

To understand what Biblo represents to the kids within the contexts of their daily lives, without exploring the various children's family backgrounds in any detail, we posed open questions about what the kids did when they were not at Biblo. For some, this question was answered by pointing to other after school-activities, "arts, choir, clarinetto and piano" (Samila and Ophelia), while others would refer to their duties at home: "I do the groceries, clean the floors, and help my mum with my baby sister, so that my mum can rest" (Hanna). A third typical answer indicated what other places the kid would stay at, for instance, at the school yard and youth clubs. From the children's narratives Biblo represents an afterschool-activity, a period of leisure and a specific location. Because Tøyen, at least for Norwegians, is associated with socioeconomic issues, descriptions and discussions often include ethnicity, income and family living situation. We deliberately wanted to avoid these labels and refrained from asking questions that would highlight them. Letting the kids tell their library stories without labelling the narrator was our way of doing so.

The Polaroid pictures of the library tell their own story about which elements the children highlight, prefer and use the most. Almost all picture sets include one or more photo of where the kids like to sit, or "hang", usually the cave-like padded spaces that accommodate one or two kids and up to whole groups. They use it to retreat with their mobile phones – alone or with a friend – or, in the case of the bigger spaces – to just talk with a bigger group of friends. Many presented photos related to what they like to do, activities such as playing chess, gaming, reading, using the 3D-printer. In many cases, the activities overlap: one proceeds from relaxing alone with the phone to talking with someone who is present in the room to playing a game on the phone and relaxing etc. Table 15.1 shows the mo-

tives the children presented. Although 12 kids were interviewed, some worked in pairs and one person took only two photos, so all in all there are nine sets of photos and 37 photos. The table also lists initials of the children who took the photos, and these initials (given name) will also be used when we present our findings. When we quote from the interviews, we do not use the children's actual names, to preserve their anonymity. The children are: Alanna, Hanna, Sara/Mindy/Mel, Samila/Ophelia, Megan, Yan, Tanya, Tambar, Tony.

Tab. 15.1: "What I like at Biblo"

No. of photos – children	Children's preferred areas or activities (no. of photos in parenthesis)	Why I like it
A, T, SMM, M, S&O	Seating area 1: Large "cave". Seats up to eight persons. Round windows, submarine atmosphere. (6)	A good place to hang out, relaxing, talking, being on the phone
S&O, T, M, Y, A	Kitchen: Put in an old lorry, seats eight, max four can work there at the same time (5)	Like cooking, what is served, hang out
H, A, Y, M, S&O	Book shelves/books (5)	Reading. Like to read at Biblo, borrow books to read at home
A, S&O, SMM	Seating area 2 "motor of truck". Seats max four persons (3)	Hang out, talk, look at the phone with friends
T, S&O	3D printer (3)	Making stuff
H, Y. T	Computers (3)	Playing games, surfing
M, A	Seating area 3 "ski gondola", can be closed. Seats max. six persons. (2)	Like it for hang out, talking, can be closed, do homework
S&O, SMM	Seating area 4: "Cave/tunnel", with soft padding, seats up to three. Underwater photo illustration (2)	Hang out, talking, being on the phone
Y, T	Chess boards (2)	Like playing chess
T S&O,	Lego wall (2)	Can play with it, build things
SMM	Seating area 5: Round table w/ parasol. Seats up to eight persons. (1)	Like to play, be with friends
H	Sofa (1)	Hang out, relax
T	Stage (1)	Text-lab

Findings

Atmosphere and Activities

In the four-space model (Jochumsen, Rasmussen, and Skot-Hansen 2012), the spaces designate "overlapping functions that interact in the library space both physically and virtually. The model indicates the possibilities for experiencing, discovering, participating and creating the new library must offer the users." However, the "overall task is to make all four spaces interact by incorporating them in the library's architecture, design, services, programs and choice of partnerships." Biblo as a library space comes close to presenting itself as such a new library, where the architecture underpins stimulation, relaxation, inspiration and well-being for kids.

The activities and the atmosphere as we observed and perceived it gave the impression of a quiet, active, yet also relaxing place. From our own observations at the library, the big library space has a remarkably calm and quiet atmosphere even when there are many people present. Children form groups, pairs and sit alone at the various tables, sofas, workspaces and move between them. Although there are activities in the kitchen area, on the stage behind the curtains or by the 3D-printer, these attract rather small groups. Very seldom the room feels left "empty" because of such activities; very seldom the room feels crowded. At the computer section, there is some commotion and cooperation due to the games that kids play there and online phenomena shared with others, but most of the time the kids sit quietly by their computers. There is seldom observable striving to get to the most popular spaces, although certain areas and activities, like making food in the kitchen section, only provides room for up to four persons at the time.

From the photos, we could see what areas and activities that the kids liked the most about Biblo. Although we could observe some of the preferred activities and some popular spots to stay, the photos provide us with a more nuanced sense of the kids' preferences. Among the motives that recur (see Table 15.1) were a big truck which has been made into a sofa, and the kitchen placed in a lorry, among one of the cave-like sofa-rooms. The kids who have taken these pictures underline that what they like to do here is to relax and to talk with friends. They like to be there, using their mobile phones, with friends or alone. Sara, Mindy and Mel, who we interviewed as a group, took pictures only of such places. When asked about what they liked to do at Biblo, they stressed Biblo as a place to meet and talk to friends. The places they preferred were all places that made such activities possible. Equally popular were the bookshelves, although they represent reading and borrowing books.

Zooming in on one of the most popular places, we tried to learn the attraction of the kitchen space. Most of the kids would say they like it because they like to cook. Only three or four children can help with cooking or baking because of the small kitchen, but the food is served to everyone. As it is popular, we learned the use comes with a number of rules: to eat, you need to have a bar stool to sit on, thereby securing that there is not a big crowd circling around the food, and only eight can eat at the same time. The portions of food served are small; Biblo is not responsible for feeding the users, only to give them a taste of what is cooked. Up to four people can work at the same time (this is not a rule, but due to the limited size). Among Biblo's guidelines is also the rule that all food made or consumed at the library should be sugar-free. From our baking sessions, we knew that many of these were contested, as kids would like to be served many times or have bigger portions or sit two persons at one stool, while some would often ask us to provide recipes which contained sugar and complain about the fact that what we made was too wholesome and not so sweet. In the interviews, however, differences of opinions were also expressed: "We made sugar-free waffles. They tasted nothing", or "We made cauliflower soup. It was really good!"

Apart from these recurrent motives, the bookshelves, computer section and certain sitting areas were parts of the room many of the kids represented in their photos. Those who represented the computer section underlined gaming and the fact that everyone at the computers were playing the same game. One kid complained however that their friends spent too much time at the computers, which was boring. Photos of the bookshelves were represented in five of nine data-sets and reading as an activity was brought up by almost all the kids. The girls who mainly used Biblo as a hang out place said they liked to read, and had more than once asked the staff to read to them. Some loaned in big quantities, while others preferred the school library for loans.

From the motives, the library's functions to inspire and excite its uses and providing places to perform and create seemed well taken care of, although the emphasis on reading is perhaps not significantly mirrored in the design and services.

As we talked to the kids about the photos they had taken, we also wanted to know more, and learned about the library in the context of their daily life.

The Library in the Context of the Children's Everyday Life

Before we started this phase of the project our assumption was that Biblo provided the kids a sort of haven in an urban context, and a safe space in a neighborhood with social challenges and few areas to hang out. However, the kids said little

about feeling unsafe in the neighborhood, and Biblo is no longer the only "haven" around.

In the group we interviewed we found out that most of them lived in the neighborhoods, but there were also some coming by subway in to Tøyen from the suburbs. Some of them came every day, and sometimes stayed until closing time. Regardless of address, all the children we talked to were introduced to the library by someone. Yan told us that his teacher introduced him to Biblo, and since then he had come back almost every day. Other kids had friends introducing them, urging them to come, and showing them around, as was the case with two girls, Ophelia and Samila. Some had parents who urged them to go.

How the kids described Biblo in the interviews suggests that even though the kids themselves did not feel insecure, security was an issue for the parents, some of whom talked about that aspect with the kids. The importance of the parents' approval for the youngest kids, who are ten, must be taken into account when speaking about the success of Biblo. The employees speak to parents at meetings at school to introduce them to the intentions of the library. The kids referred to the parents' ideas of safety and preferences for Biblo at various occasions. Megan said: "My mother prefers me to come here [Biblo]. She doesn't like me going to K1". Tambar told us that his father had started talking about wanting him to go to Biblo from when he was eight years old. Now he loved being there. Megan added that she would like to go more often to K1 because they have "many games", you are allowed to shout and run – and there are no eating restrictions. Still, "I mostly come here. Because my mum says its best that I learn to read. My mum likes that I read and, that I'm active and such things. I like reading. Reading is almost a hobby for me… Before I knew about K1, I came here every day."

When we talked to Yan about the pleasure of cooking and baking, he also brought up his parents. He said: "I like to cook… Now I can bake a cake without help from my mum." Learning to cook was framed as becoming independent from the parents, and (maybe) helping out or make his mother proud. Biblo in this regard served as empowering him, making him proud and learn to solve everyday problems.

The relationship between Biblo and the home also came up in the context of doing homework, where some of the kids wanted a social environment, some preferred to do this at home and not at Biblo and some kids wanted help from the staff.

For the kids coming to Biblo, it is put in the context of the other youth services for their age, the local youth club K1 and the after-school clubs at the various local schools. All these attract local kids, who compare Biblo to these. K1 was described as a typical youth club, with games and activities, and less access restriction. There are more rules at Biblo, both concerning access and behavior – no

running, shouting, sugar/candy and so on. For some of our informants, the relatively calm at Biblo is part of the attraction, while one girl finds the staff and the rules somewhat strict.

As these kids move about in the city, another frame for comparison was other library branches. Those of our informants who were not local came mainly to Tøyen because of the library. Those who came to Tøyen from other parts of the city could say: "Tøyen is good." One girl, Alanna, preferred Tøyen/Biblo to the library at Furuset, although the latter is closer to her home: "We can play, we can draw, we can do what we want. At Furuset we can't do anything. It is no fun. Sometimes the older kids are there, they can do things, they dance and play Fortnite". Yan had a similar position: " Biblo is the best library in the whole world! Before we used to go to the library at Furuset. So… I entered, it was a lot of noise, many kids screaming. No one says anything." For him, Biblo is calm, organized and a friendly place: "Everything is perfect!"

But Biblo is of course also an indoor meeting place, comparable to outdoor settings. Despite the good intentions behind the new activities and hangouts for teenagers and tweens at Tøyen, some had noticed drawbacks. Tony lamented on the change from outdoor to indoor activities. "Before we used to be outdoors a lot", he said, and described to us how he used to meet his friends outside, as for instance in the school yard. Now all activities had moved inside, to K1 and Biblo, and he would move from one to the other, to find his friends and according to the preference of activities (i.e. play ping pong at K1, which is not an option at Biblo). The research shows the varied motivations for coming to the library, and the varied contexts of this particular library, when seen from the users' perspectives.

Relations

In our previous research, we found the staff's primary aim was to establish good relationships with their users. The kids generally described the staff affectionately, although how much they interact with them, varied. Some staff members are described as "strict", others with admiration for their skills, or because they are "fun". Generally, they are on a first name basis, and different kids relate to different adults among the staff. Several named their preferred members of staff, indicating their capabilities in various way, i.e. making 3D-prints, or more generally, referring to them as nice, or "I like her/ him". There seems to be an element of identifying with staff members in different ways, based on common interests, personality types, or who welcomed them and helped them at their first visit. The staff's practice of properly welcoming newcomers, giving them a tour, making in-

troductions, is a way of starting to build relationship with the kids and familiarizing them with the library.

During our period of research, we also observed different types of interaction with the adults. Some girls made a point of "spying" on one staff member, clearly enjoying the playfulness, and feeling secure in the fact that they were within boundaries of "tolerated" behavior. Although the staff members suggest activities and remind the children of current events, they never pressure them into anything. Some children could almost always be observed using their mobile phones alone or being completely absorbed in something without any common interaction. Having one's space respected seems integral to being at Biblo.

Corresponding to the stress the staff put on making good relationships, the kids seemed unproportionally concerned about staff who were "too strict" and the ways they imposed limitations on their liberty. There were considerable variations in opinion among the kids on how strict the staff was at Biblo, and how strict they should be. While some would underline that the rules and regulations at Biblo were precisely what made them prefer Biblo to K1 or other libraries in Oslo, others, like Megan, found the staff too strict, and said that was why they preferred other places:

> Let me be honest. The teachers… The adults, they get crabby quite fast. And we can't run. Before I knew about the rules here, I had some candy once. Then they made me stay outside for 15 minutes before I was allowed back. It was freezing.

Most of the kids named the adults they liked the best in conversations with us. Yan spoke very warmly about a male staff member who talked to him, told him stuff and taught him technical intricacies. They shared interests, but beyond that there seemed to be a feeling of friendship, warmth and protection. In the description Yan gave of the relationship, we could hear reminiscences of what the library staff earlier had described as children's need to "have somewhere they can ask questions, where they meet adults who are neither teachers or family, who they can talk to – this is maybe a bit diffuse, but there is an 'atmosphere', 'attitude' here" (Evjen and Vold 2018). They underlined that "we have the same rules, but different ways of understanding and connecting with various children" (Evjen and Vold 2018).

The relations to other kids came up frequently in our conversations. Some of the kids came alone, some with friends or siblings and many of them came to meet up with others. Yan had made friends with another boy at the new school and introduced him to Biblo. He told us how he helped his friend to understand the rules and possibilities he himself recently had understood and been introduced to. This group, sister, brother and friend came every day and stayed until closing

time. They were especially fond of the computer section, the chess table and the kitchen.

Activities

When Biblo was first established, the reference group who participated in the planning process clearly wanted an "unorganized" library space, where the kids themselves decide how they spend their time, and without too many events and organized activities (Vold and Evjen 2016). Biblo has become such a space, but also offers regular, daily activities. These include homework help (maths) on Mondays, cooking on Tuesdays and Textlab on Fridays. The activities are quite different, from the low-key cooking sessions to Textlab, which is a stage event where the kids present a text, something they have made themselves, for instance in the form of a poem, a rap lyric or other prose. Usually the participant group is quite small, but through our interviews and observations it seems like many of the Biblo kids attend occasionally or regularly.

Tambar told us about his experience of participating at Textlab. It was "quite scary", and he "talked much too fast", and in the end "had to do it once more, to get it right". But he did get it right, and he smiled from cheek to cheek telling us about the event. It was obvious he had ended up with a feeling of mastering the stage and overcoming his own nervousness. He was also very fond of the 3D-printer. He told us how he had started using it, how the adults had helped in the beginning, but he had moved on to making his own designs. He told us how proud he was to show one of the results to his father afterwards. For most of the other children we spoke with, activities like these were less important than hanging out, chilling and meeting the friends they already knew. Sara, Mindy and Mel said they sometimes went to "movie night", but it depended on the movie. Often they preferred to just talk.

During our conversations with the kids, it came up that three of them had for various reasons lived in Norway between eight months and two years. The photos these kids took did not vary from those of the other children regarding what they liked to do at Biblo, where they liked to sit etc. But when talking about activities in the interviews, they underlined the learning aspects of the library to a greater extent than the others. Alanna said: "I do my homework here. But I prefer not to ask for help. If they [the staff] help you, you never learn anything." Alanna expresses a clear motivation, both for learning Norwegian and for learning and educating herself in general. The other two newcomers to the country reveal no such hesitations about asking for help, but they explain that they only ask when they don't understand a question from their homework, or if there are words or expressions

they are unfamiliar with. Yan prefers a social setting while doing homework, and the presence of the staff is important. "We talk [about different things], hang out. He [one of the staff members] doesn't help me if I don't ask". While some children prefer to do their homework at home, others find that Biblo is preferable, usually because of the staff members who can help or explain language or content.

Considering the results of our previous research (2018), where the staff put little emphasis on reading and promotion of literature, the fact that most of the children underline the importance of books and reading to their experience of Biblo stands out. Two examples illustrate this clearly, first, the girl Megan who says "reading is almost like a hobby", and second, the conversation with two of the younger kids:

> Samira: My favourite book shelf. This is where I loan almost all of my books. I particularly like that row. It is "silly and fun" (tull og tøys)
> Ophelia: It [the picture] represents mostly that we enjoy borrowing books at Biblo.
> Q: Do you borrow books every time you come here?
> Samira: When I do, I borrow 3–4 books, quite a lot really. I return them … not every time. We can keep the books for a certain period. If I finish earlier, I return them. At school we can loan books, but they are not the same as here. We have more to choose from here.
> Ophelia: And at school we can only have two books each. Here we can have as many as we like.

The three girls, Sara, Mindy and Mel, concurred: "We like to loan books. Also at school. If we are bored, we get books. Sometimes we ask the adults to read to us. It has happened. It went well and not so well (giggles)." It turned out that some of the kids were noisy, and there was a lot of talking instead.

Asked what she liked best at Biblo, one of the girls who was quite new to Norway, Hanna, said:

> H: Almost everything. What I like the best is cooking and reading.
> Q: Yes, you took a photo of the books.
> H: Yes, and this book is my favorite.
> Q: Do you read here? Or do you borrow the books?
> H: I don't borrow books here, I do that at school. I don't have to borrow here.
> Q: But you read here?
> H: Yes, I read here.

Alanna said: "This [book] is funny. I read books every day. I read them here and I take them home. For instance, at Christmas, then I brought home books about Christmas to read. I read one hour a day, or more." Asked if she got help finding books, she said. "I find them myself. I think it is better to find them myself." She explicitly related reading to learning: "If I read Norwegian books, I learn Norwegian better".

Speaking with the kids about reading, it was hard to miss how all the kids who spoke to us about love of literature and books referred to the same two titles as their favorite book, which they either took home, read at Biblo or would have someone read to them. These are bestselling and hugely popular titles, and as such it is not very strange that the kids have the same preference. However, the pluralism that a library can cater for, is not visible. In independent conversations it turned out that several of the children had been asked to return books they did not have on loan. "I have had many messages about an unreturned book, and I have looked for it everywhere. So now I feel that if I try to borrow a book, they [the staff] say that I have to find the missing book, I have to read here." In those cases, the children all concluded that they did not want to loan books anymore.

The many mentions of books are also quite remarkable when placed in the context of the interviews with the staff, who would highlight the importance of cultural experiences as drama and music, but not literary ones. For example, watching a theatre performance is regarded as more than an experience; it is a manner of building cultural skills in kids with little cultural capital (Evjen and Vold 2018). Later, such experiences and skills might make them more inclined to take part in the cultural public, because it is familiar, rather than strange. The staff look at their work as enabling kids to grow, and they voice a desire for the kids to find out in what direction and though what means they will grow, at the same time as they voice a more typical Bildung-version of growth. Homework is valued as more important than reading, and at times as two conflicting activities. One of the staff members pointed out to us that if you are struggling with your homework the last thing you want is to have a book recommendation.

The conversations with the kids make us ask ourselves if not at least one professional children's and youth librarian employed at Biblo would have made a difference for these kids who come there to seek pleasure in reading, and also for those for whom reading is a struggle. Someone who has engraved from professional training the importance of never letting a user feel ashamed or blamed, in order to promote a hospitable library culture.

Discussion

Participation and Empowerment, Autonomy and Freedom

The link between libraries and democracies is well established. Libraries give the public access to information and cultural products that enable the public to participate in the larger society. Biblo is a part of this democratic process, as an arena for participation and empowerment for its users. As of today, Biblo has received

numerous awards and has a high standing among in the library field for having accomplished a multifunctional library space for kids in their age group. When we look back on our research projects, what can librarians, library developers and city planners learn from Biblo?

Firstly, it is a good idea to include the users in setting up the library, making them feel the library is theirs from the start. From the photos, the children's preference of places at Biblo were quite consistent. Maybe the many functions that the room was created to enhance can be used more. The rotating shelves, for instance, that should give kid opportunities to see new books even when they sit at their favorite spot, do not move.

But to copy the architecture and initial process will not in itself guarantee success, as participation and empowerment at Biblo rather seems to rely on creating stable relations between the staff and users.

Contributing to empowerment among the children requires a safe environment. The experience Tambar shared with us, when he overcame his initial fear and performed at Textlab, is one of coping and accomplishment. Biblo can in other words be an arena where children can feel safe enough to challenge themselves, outside of school or organized activities. Examples of mastering new activities are many and diverse at Biblo: Yan learning to bake a cake, Alanna learning Norwegian, Tambar decoding the 3D-printer – all these seemingly small instances of accomplishment are big for the individual and have the potential of contributing to empowerment. Homework, cooking or rapping are all activities where one can learn, understand and challenge oneself outside the private realm, together with "strangers", albeit in a familiar setting. Having someone (staff members) available to ask carries different meaning for different children. No doubt for those who – for different reasons – do not have parents who can easily answer questions about schoolwork or Norwegian society, this aspect of Biblo is very important in order to make sense of the new context of one's life. Such moments also mark Biblo as a place for integration.

Secondly, no single space or service can cater for all. While some kids find Biblo too rigid and quiet, this atmosphere is the main reason others prefer the library. We know from earlier interviews that the unruliest kids have been banned from Biblo and can only re-enter after the parents have had a conversation with the staff. While some kids come in search of a place to hang out, others come to do their homework, to read and to borrow books. The photos and the conversation with the kids show us a discrepancy in the way the collection has a limited significance in the view of the staff, and in the room as such, and a higher significance in the regards of the kids. If those who come to Biblo to read and borrow books cease to come because the library services are poor in this regard, Biblo will lose some of their clientele. For these kids, there are few obvious alternatives in the

neighborhood. This shows that a library should never be the singular hang out option for kids in one neighborhood.

Thirdly, the users are of a loving but unfaithful kind. They move about in the city. They are therefore able to compare Biblo with other library branches in Oslo. Some will come to Biblo from other parts of the city. Others in the age group will come a few times, then the cease to come, even if they live in the vicinity, and then they may return. The distinctiveness of Biblo, may in this context be a success factor: the library has a brand which is well communicated. The many and particular rules of Biblo are well communicated, understood and recognized, and are possible for the regulars to teach newcomers. The kids know what to expect. The unfaithful behavior is also a consequence of the library's aim to present itself as a low intensity meeting-place. This is not a club with a costly membership that requires particular use; on the contrary, Biblo is free to use and leave as you wish. As we see it, the space works as safe and hospitable, as a joint effort by staff and users, to welcome newcomers and communicate the expected behavior.

And lastly, in the way kids use the library, the "library"-word is important. Perhaps not for the users themselves, but our study shows that for kids in this age group, what the parents mean, is very important. Developing Biblo in the direction of a regular youth club is therefore also limiting the place's attractiveness to some of their users.

The experience of autonomy and freedom are crucial for the kids' ownership of the library. Turning to the children's responses, the kids do not perceive the adults as forcing through any distinct cultural or educational program on their behalf. They view the space as open to them, somewhere they can do what they want, what they prefer. If something is boring, or irrelevant, then they just skip it. The kids value this autonomy and are very sensitive to having it reduced or limited. If they are hindered too much in what they like to do, they cease coming. If they are treated unfairly (as in the case of the borrowed books), they avoid the activity that triggered that treatment. The stress on relations that the staff conveyed has its counterpart here and the kids are in general very happy about the staff, some are very fond of them, while others have minor complaints.

An ideal public arena allows for discussion, exchanging views, being familiarized with the standpoint of others. However, making sure the possibility exists does not mean that this is what usually happens or something users want. As a public sphere for kids, Biblo is in addition marked on the one side as familiar and welcoming, and on the other as a space where one encounters strangers. Both the staff and the design contribute to this balance. A catch phrase in the library community in recent years has been to move "from collection to connection" (Jochumsen 2017). Biblo's spatial design has underscored the value of the collection in favor of activities (Vold and Evjen 2015). The staff members are not librarians and

are not necessarily interested in the mediation of literature and reading, for instance because they see that many of the kids who come are not good readers (Evjen and Vold 2018). Therefore, it is quite remarkable that many of the children headed towards the shelves when asked to take pictures of what they particularly liked about Biblo. In the interviews, they articulated that this was because they liked reading.

Klingenberg (2018) stresses the important effect the public library has, as endowing its users with dignity. In some respects, this perspective is relevant to the kids at Biblo. Although they, as most Norwegian kids, occupy public space as a most natural thing, some of them may have experienced exclusion from (adult) society as they have been perceived as noisy, out of place as big children and met the judgement that adult immigrants and poor people also regularly address. The way the kids spoke about the library, even sometimes naming it "the best library in the world", show us that Biblo has this quality of making children feel welcome, at home, and experience ownership of their library.

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